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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER EAID KPAL PHUM IS
SUBJECT: AHMAD TIBI DISCUSSES FATAH REFORM, PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. Israeli-Arab Member of Knesset Ahmad Tibi told the Consul General June 30 that the two primary issues in the Palestinian political arena are the Fatah Congress and ongoing reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas. Tibi said PA President Abbas (Abu Mazen) managed to bolster his own position by garnering the support of Fatah Central Committee (FCC) members Ahmad Qurei (Abu Ala'a) and Muhammad Ghnaim (Abu Maher) to hold the Fatah Congress in the West Bank city of Bethlehem. Tibi said Abu Mazen has approached Syrian President Asad to ask for help getting Fatah delegates out of Gaza to attend the Congress. Tibi said he doubted that ongoing Fatah-Hamas reconciliation talks in Cairo would yield an agreement, in spite of heavy Egyptian pressure on the factions to find common ground. He speculated that some good might come of an agreement; if the factions could work together to prepare for PA elections in January 2010, Hamas might perform poorly based on its many failings in Gaza. Tibi encouraged the USG to work with Syria and Qatar to put pressure on Hamas to change its behavior.

¶2. (S) Summary cont. Tibi told the Consul General that he found Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo encouraging, in part because it noted the dilemma of minorities in the Middle East. Tibi called Israeli-Arabs the "best known minority," and said he hopes USG assistance to Israel can be allocated to help overcome gaps in the standard of living between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel. Tibi also encouraged the USG to keep up pressure on the PA and Israel to abide by their Roadmap commitments and to resume discussions, saying that only the USG has the influence to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. End Summary.

ABBAS'S PROSPECTS BRIGHTEN WITH ANNOUNCEMENT OF FATAH GENERAL CONGRESS IN AUGUST

¶3. (S) MK Ahmad Tibi told Consul General Walles, during a June 30 meeting in Jerusalem, that Abu Mazen's ability to schedule the Fatah Congress in the West Bank represents a victory for him over the Fatah Old Guard. Tibi said Abu Ala'a shifted his support to Abu Mazen's proposal when he realized that he needed to stay close to the President to win support for his own reelection to the FCC. He added that Abu Mazen no longer needs to make compromises to hold the Congress, and downplayed the importance of Tunis-based FCC member Faruq Qaddumi's opposition, calling it "Qaddumi's own business."

¶4. (S) Tibi described Abbas's prospects at the Congress as good, based on internal Fatah polling results. According to polls, he said, Abu Mazen ranks first, Abu Maher second, Marwan Barghuti as a possible third, with Qaddumi in fourth and Abu Ala'a in fifth. Tibi said Sa'eb Erekat, Muhammad Dahlan, and Naser al-Qidwa are likely to pass the threshold for election to the FCC. He said the polls have canvased at

least 50 percent of the Fatah cadre and described them as reliable.

¶ 15. (S) Tibi said Abu Mazen still faces the problem of getting Fatah delegates from Gaza to Bethlehem for the Congress. He said Abu Mazen asked Syrian President Asad to push Hamas to allow Fatah delegates to leave Gaza, but he did not know how Asad responded. Tibi applauded Abu Mazen's desire to hold the Congress as Fatah's first democratic effort in decades, and said this appears to be helping Abu Mazen.

PROSPECTS FOR PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION NOT AS BRIGHT

¶ 16. (S) Tibi said that he did not expect ongoing Fatah-Hamas reconciliation talks in Cairo to succeed, in spite of intense Egyptian pressure on the two factions to reach an agreement. He said that, should Hamas and Fatah make progress, an interim national unity government could be a step toward removing Hamas from power through elections next year, given that Hamas has lost popularity due to its mistakes in Gaza. A national unity government might also resolve the issue of captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Tibi said, and, eventually, end the "siege" of Gaza.

¶ 17. (S) Tibi warned that the price of a Fatah-Hamas agreement might be the removal of Salam Fayyad as PA Prime Minister. He called Fayyad "the right man at the right time in a hard place" and praised Fayyad's efforts to "build a system" for Palestinians, in spite of their lack of experience with functional institutions. He noted that Fayyad was waging

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battles on many fronts, as Hamas and Fatah both had an interest in seeing him go.

QATAR AND SYRIA COULD PLAY ROLE IN RECONCILIATION

¶ 18. (S) Tibi told the Consul General that Qatar and Syria have a role to play in reconciliation, should they choose to. Hamas depends on Qatar and Syria for financial, logistical, and media support, he said, and if they insisted Hamas sign an agreement, Hamas leaders would do it. He encouraged the USG to engage with Syria and Qatar to put pressure on Hamas. He also encouraged the USG to put pressure on Arab governments to meet their financial commitments to the PA.

¶ 19. (S) The Consul General reiterated the USG requirement that any PA government accept the Quartet principles, and said that the USG would only react to a proposed government program once it has seen something in writing. He said that Egypt might convince Fatah and Hamas to set some issues aside -- such as government platform and formation -- in the interest of reaching an agreement, but that this would not change the USG's criteria for engaging with the PA. The Consul General agreed with Tibi's praise for Fayyad and told him that the USG is in the process of transferring an additional USD 200 million to the PA as budgetary support.

USG SHOULD CONTINUE TO WORK TO BRING THE PARTIES BACK TO NEGOTIATIONS

¶ 10. (S) Tibi told the Consul General that he found President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo very encouraging, and that subsequent calls for a cessation of settlement activity have also built the USG's credibility in Arab countries. He said pressure from the White House encouraged PM Netanyahu to refer to a Palestinian state in his June 14 speech, and that the USG needs to keep up the pressure to keep the GOI moving toward negotiations. He said that Abu Mazen expects the Obama Administration to maintain pressure on Israel to abide by its Roadmap commitments. Abu Mazen will lose the support of Palestinians and the Arab world if he meets with Netanyahu

before Israel freezes settlement growth, Tibi said, adding that Abu Mazen is nervous Obama might call for a return to negotiations even if Israel refuses to make concessions. Tibi said Abu Mazen knows he cannot say no to Obama, but that negotiations might be premature if meaningful steps do not occur first.

USG ASSISTANCE COULD BE USED TO HELP ISRAELI-ARABS

¶11. (S) Tibi said that he was glad to hear Obama mention minorities in the Middle East during his Cairo speech, and pointed out that Israeli-Arabs are the "best-known minority." He said that he believed the USG was not sufficiently aware of the plight of Israeli-Arabs, and that he hoped USG assistance to the GOI could be used to bridge the gap in the quality of life between Arab and Jewish Israelis. The Consul General encouraged Tibi to work with the Embassy on this issue.

WALLES